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ABSTRACT

At the present time, approximately 50% of the population of Guatemala is classified as indigenous, while in Mexico the figure is estimated to be between 10% and 15%. The figures are deceptive, however, since there is no legal definition of what constitutes an Indian in either country. This unit contains lessons that focus on indigenous groups in both Guatemala and Mexico. The lessons are meant to supplement a study of the history and geography of these two countries. The lessons focus on Mayan children, the poetry of Humberto Ak'abal, Mayan language, Mayan folk tales, and Mayan textiles. Includes information on Mexican education and news and opinions from local newspapers. (BT)

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Mexico and Guatemala

A Portfolio of Supplementary Lessons On Indigenous People

SO 032 447

For my Middle School Colleagues
and their Students

Submitted by Pamela Benson

Gale Holdren

Fulbright-Hays Grantee
Summer 2000
Mexico and Guatemala

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Background Notes to the Teacher

The region referred to as Mesoamerica—a region which includes Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador--abounds with the remnants of former civilizations, from towering pyramids, to elaborate palaces, statuary and intricate stone carvings. It was thought at one time that the people who built the great cities of Tikal in Guatemala and Palenque, Chichen Itza, Teotihuacan, and Monte Alban in Mexico, to name a few well-known ones, had disappeared. Textbooks reported this fact and school children learned it.

Though early in the 16th century Spanish conquistadors overpowered the descendants of people who built these great cities, we know now that they did not disappear. The story of what did happen to them is both painful and remarkable. They were subjugated and forced to work on plantations and construction projects. The conquering Spaniards introduced many diseases such as typhus, smallpox, and cholera to which the indigenous population had no resistance. By some estimates, 80% of them died as a result. Despite overwhelming odds, those indigenous people who survived the cultural upheaval resulting from the conquest continued to speak their own languages and to observe customs and traditions of their ancient culture. Many still do and we are learning more about their history every year.

At the present time, approximately 50% of the population of Guatemala is classified as indigenous, while in Mexico the figure is estimated to be between 10 and 15%. The figures are deceptive, however, since there is no legal definition of what constitutes an Indian in either country.

> In Guatemala, as in other Latin American countries, "race" is more a matter of culture than genetics: one is an Indian because one defines oneself as such by wearing the clothes, speaking the language, and keeping to the values and traditions that symbolize Indian ethnicity. (Wright, p 116)

In much of Guatemala and in parts of Mexico, the indigenous population outnumbers the *ladino* or *mestizo* population. It is reported that throughout the Mexican Republic, there are more than 80 indigenous languages and dialects spoken. The highest concentrations of indigenous people are in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Yucatan, and Michoacan and

Puebla. Artists in many of these groups produce beautiful works of art by weaving and producing ceramics using techniques and designs handed down through the centuries.

Tourists from the industrialized world are drawn to the traditional cultures of indigenous people and to the handicrafts they produce. Travel literature and postcards which feature women and children in intricately woven traditional dress, colorful crafts, markets, and simple thatched dwellings appeal to a romantic idea of the beauty and simplicity of their lives. Though visitors purchase handmade weaving and other distinctive crafts as travel souvenirs, many indigenous people who make them are among the poorest of the poor in both Mexico and Guatemala. Their struggle for equal opportunities in education and employment continues today.

This portfolio contains lessons that focus on indigenous groups in both Guatemala and Mexico. The lessons are meant to supplement a study of the history and geography of these two countries. Questions are posed for students to consider and it is hoped that they will stimulate an interest in and an appreciation for the cultural diversity of these two neighboring countries and for the importance of human rights.

Pamela Benson
Washington, DC
September 2000

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Mayan children: What do they learn?

The following excerpt (Chapter X) is from a book entitled I, Rigoberta Menchu An Indian Woman in Guatemala* by Nobel Peace Prize (1992) winner Rigoberta Menchu. In it, she discusses the kind of knowledge that Mayan children learn from their culture about the natural world. Read the chapter and consider the following questions.

1. What do young Mayan children learn about water?

2. Why do Mayans ask the earth's permission before planting seed for their crops?

3. Maize (corn) is central to the Maya. They believe that it has been handed down to them from their ancestors and that "people are made of maize." Speculate on where such a belief could have come from and how it has endured through the centuries.

4. Prayers and ceremonies are for the whole community. How would you explain what this means?

5. In what way do parents want their children to be like the sun? Would parents in our own culture want their children to have these qualities? Why or why not?

6. What distinction does the author make between sheep and chickens and other animals?

*Burgos-Debray, Elisabeth, Ed. Translated by Ann Wright. I, Rigoberta Menchu An Indian Woman in Guatemala. London/New York: Verso 1984

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X

THE NATURAL WORLD. THE EARTH, MOTHER OF MAN

> *'We must respect the one God at the heart of the sky, which is the Sun'*
>
> —Rigoberta Menchú

> *'Tojil, in his own natural darkness, struck the leather of his sandal with a stone, and from it, at that very moment, came a spark, then a flash, followed by a flame, and the new fire burned in all its splendour'*
>
> —Popul Vuh

From very small children we receive an education which is very different from white children, *ladinos*. We Indians have more contact with nature. That's why they call us polytheistic. But we're not polytheistic . . . or if we are, it's good, because it's our culture, our customs. We worship – or rather not worship but respect – a lot of things to do with the natural world, the most important things for us. For instance, to us, water is sacred. Our parents tell us when we're very small not to waste water, even when we have it. Water is pure, clean, and gives life to man. Without water we cannot survive, nor could our ancestors have survived. The idea that water is sacred is in us children, and we never stop thinking of it as something pure. The same goes for the earth. Our parents tell us: 'Children, the earth is the mother of man, because she gives him food.' This is especially true for us whose life is based on the crops we grow. Our people eat maize, beans and plants. We can't eat ham, or cheese, or things made with equipment, with machines. So we think of the earth as the mother of man, and our parents teach us to respect the earth. We must only harm the earth when we are in need. This is why, before we sow our maize, we have to ask the earth's permission.

Pom, copal, is a sacred ingredient for our people. We use it to express our feelings for the earth, so that she will allow us to cultivate

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her. *Copal* is the resin of a tree. It has a smell like incense. We burn it and it gives off a very strong smell: a smoke with a very rich, delicious, aroma. We use the candle, water and lime a great deal in our ceremonies. We use candles to represent the earth, water and maize, which is the food of man. We believe (and this has been passed down to us by our ancestors) that our people are made of maize. We're made of white maize and yellow maize. We must remember this. We put a candle out for man, as the son of the natural world, the universe, and the members of the family join together in prayer. The prayers usually ask the earth for permission to plant our crops at sowing time, to give us a good harvest, and then to give thanks with all our might, with all our being, for a good harvest.

The prayers and ceremonies are for the whole community. We pray to our ancestors, reciting their prayers which have been known to us for a long time – a very, very long time. We evoke the representatives of the animal world; we say the names of dogs. We say the names of the earth, the God of the earth, and the God of water. Then we say the name of the heart of the sky – the Sun. Our grandfathers say we must ask the sun to shine on all its children: the trees, animals, water, man. We ask it to shine on our enemies. To us an enemy is someone who steals or goes into prostitution. So, you see, it's a different world. This is how we make our pleas and our promises. It doesn't refer so much to the real world, but it includes part of our reality. A prayer is made up of all this. We make a definite plea to the earth. We say: 'Mother Earth, you who gives us food, whose children we are and on whom we depend, please make this produce you give us flourish and make our children and our animals grow . . . ', and other things as well. Or we say: 'We make our vows for ten days so that you concede us permission, your permission, Mother Earth, who are sacred, to feed us and give our children what they need. We do not abuse you, we only beg your permission, you who are part of the natural world and part of the family of our parents and our grandparents.' This means we believe, for instance, that the sun is our grandfather, that he is a member of our family. 'We respect you and love you and ask that you love us as we love you' – those prayers are specially for the earth. For the sun, we say: 'Heart of the sky, you are our father, we ask you to give your warmth and light to our animals, our maize, our beans, our plants, so that they may grow and our children may eat.' We evoke the colour of the sun, and this has a

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special importance for us because this is how we want our children to live – like a light which shines, which shines with generosity. It means a warm heart and it means strength, life-giving strength. It's something you never lose and you find it everywhere. So when we evoke the colour of the sun, it's like evoking all the elements which go to make up our life. The sun, as the channel to the one God, receives the plea from his children that they should never violate the rights of all the other beings which surround them. This is how we renew our prayer which says that men, the children of the one God, must respect the life of the trees, the birds, the animals around us. We say the names of birds and animals – cows, horses, dogs, cats. All these. We mention them all. We must respect the life of every single one of them. We must respect the life, the purity, the sacredness, which is water. We must respect the one God, the heart of the sky, which is the sun. We must not do evil while the sun shines upon his children. This is a promise. Then we promise to respect the life of the one creature, which is man. This is very important. We say: 'We cannot harm the life of one of your children, we are your children. We cannot kill any of your creatures, neither trees nor animals.' Then we offer up a sheep or chickens, because we believe sheep to be sacred animals, quiet animals, saintly animals, animals which don't harm other animals. They are the most tranquil animals that exist, like birds. So the community chooses certain small animals for the feast after the ceremonies.

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The Poetry of Humberto Ak'abal

The following poems by Mayan poet Humberto Ak'abal were originally published in the Quiche language and then into Spanish. Humberto Ak'abal was born in 1952 in the village of Momostenango, Totonicapan, Guatemala. In 1997 he received the International Poetry Award given by the city of Neuchatel, Switzerland and the Canto America prize in Indigenous Literatures by the House of Indigenous Writers in Mexico City in 1998. The translation into English of these poems was done by Miguel Riviera.

As you read these poems, keep in mind that despite attempts at reforms, 70% of the cultivable land in Guatemala is owned by less than 3% of the population. Furthermore, the top 20% of the population has an income 30 times (3000% greater) than the bottom 20%. The Maya people who live in the highlands of Guatemala farm their small plots on steep slopes. A headstrap or *mecapal* is used to carry heavy loads of firewood or goods to market. Some say the head strap—a piece of woven material--symbolizes the struggle of indigenous people of Guatemala. What do these poems say to you?

Grandfather

The street silent
the wind fresh.

The ninety-year old man
leaning
on the banister
of the stone bridge
looking at the river,
or the river
looking at him.

Short in stature
strong of character
fierce gray eyes
K'iche' voice.

Cornerstone of the house
and cornerstone of the town.

Tiredness

With all the weight
of a cut up tree,

a load of firewood

drips sap
on my back.

The headstrap turns to fire.

I stop for a while
and my shadow, stretching himself out,
lies on the ground
maybe more tired than I am.

And Nobody Sees Us

The flame of our blood burns
inextinguishable
in spite of the wind of centuries.

We do not speak,
our songs caught in our throats,
misery with spirit,
sadness inside fences.

Ay, I want to cry screaming!

The lands they leave for us
are the mountain slopes,
the steep hills:
little by little the rains wash them
and drag them to the valleys
that are no longer ours.

Here we are
Standing on roadsides
With our sight broken by a tear....

And nobody sees us.

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The Mecapal (The Headstrap)

for
us
indians

the sky ends
where the headstrap
begins.

Before

Before
so far back
that the sun does not remember:
the earth owned man.

Now it is the other way around.

Each One With a Shadow

Daybreak.

The sun eats the fog
and begins to paint:
roads,
trees,
houses,
animals,
people…

And to each one
he gives a shadow.

*Ak'bal, Humberto, translated by Miguel Riviera and Robert Bly, Poems I brought down from the mountain, St. Paul, Minnesota: Nineties Press 1994

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Mayan Language

Here is a guide to pronunciation in Yucatec Maya and some everyday phrases. *

Written Mayan	Sounds like
a	'ah' as in *calm*
e	'eh' as in *effort*
i	'ee' as in *keen*
o	'oh' as in *open*
oo	same sound as 'o' but held longer
u	'oo' as in *moon*
x	'sh' as in *bush*

MAYAN PHRASES

Mayan	English
Bix a belex?	Hi, how are you?
Maloob	I'm fine, OK.
Yum botic	Thank you
Mixba	You're welcome
Tu'x ka binex?	Where are you going?
Kin bin tin nah	I'm going home.
Koox tun	Let's get going.

* indy4.fdl.cc.mn.us/~isk/maya/mayatabl.html Paula Giese, 1996

Here is a poem by Mayan poet Humberto Ak'abal.* It is written in both K'iche' Maya and English. See if you can read the K'iche' version. The consonants b, c, d, f, g, j, qu, ch, h, l, m, n, p, r ,s, t, v, w, y, and z are similar to English pronunciation. The accent marks indicate emphasis. If there are no accent marks, stress is usually on the final syllable of the word.

Distance	Naj Naj
In this small country	Pa as jun ch'utin tinimit
Everything is far away:	juntira naj, naj kakanaj wi:
the food	ri wa
the education	ri wuj,ri tz'ib'
the clothes…	ri atz'yaq

Ak'bal, Humberto, translated by Miguel Riviera and Robert Bly, Poems I brought down from the mountain, St. Paul, Minnesota: Nineties Press 1999

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Mayan Folk Tale from Chiapas, Mexico *

In the beginning, it is said, there was only the sea and the sky, and the world was completely silent. The gods of both sea and sky were named Xpiyacoc and Xmucane. One day they came together and broke the silence.

"Let the waters part," said one.

"Let there be light," said the other.

"Let the great mountains rise from the sea," they said in unison.

As soon as the words were spoken, the waters parted, dawn broke on the horizon, and mountains arose in the middle of the sea. Between the mountains, foaming rivers flowed in the valleys. Along the water's edge, great forests grew. From that time forward, these gods became known as the Creator Gods.

The gods followed the advice of Xpiyacoc and Xmucane, the great-grandparent gods, as they created the Ancestors to watch over the new world. First the gods modeled them out of clay, but the rains came and the Ancestors dissolved into mud. Next the gods carved them from wood, but the rains came again and the Ancestors rotted away. Finally the Gods shaped them from corn, and when the rains came the ancestors grew tall and strong. The gods were happy and the Ancestors have been known as Earth Mother and Earth Father ever since.

Xpiyacoc and Xmucane then created villages and people to inhabit them. To each village they assigned a sacred mountain, a weaver's saint and a set of seven sacred weaving designs. The ancestor gods also gave the villages instructions about how to keep the Maya world strong and peaceful. Xpiyacoc taught them how to plant corn and make tortillas. Xmucane taught the women how to weave stories into cotton cloth by combining the sacred designs in unique patterns.

The weavers' saint assured the gods she would pass on the secrets of the sacred designs to each new girl born into a village. Young girls would practice the yarn designs by weaving them one at a time into cotton samplers.

Later they would weave more intricate samplers by combining designs, and eventually they would weave their first *huipil*. If the villagers forgot the meanings of the designs or how to combine them properly, the saint promised to refresh their memories through their dreams.

* Sola, Michele and Foxx, Jeffrey. Angela Weaves a Dream, New York: Hyperion Books 1997

Questions for Discussion

Folk tales often tell us about important aspects of the culture they are taken from.

1. What food crop is central to the Maya?

2. Why do you think weaving is important in Mayan culture?

3. What other creation stories are you familiar with?

4. What do all creation stories have in common?

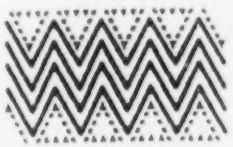
Symbols in Mayan Textiles

Weaving is an art that has been handed down through generations of Maya women since pre-Hispanic times. One article of clothing may tell a whole legend through the use of symbols. In some Maya communities, the clothing you wear identifies you with your ethnic group and the place where you are from through color and design. The blouse a woman or a girl wears is called a *huipil*.

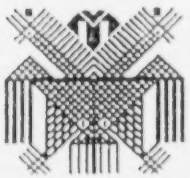
> Through her *huipil* Maria communicates not only her social identities as Kaqchikel Maya and Comalapan but also her personal identity. Not one of her *huipiles* is identical to the *huipil* of another woman. When Maria's favorite *huipil* dries on the grass near a public washing place, her acquaintances and friends can recognize it as her own creation. (P.76 Linda Asturias de Barrios, *Weaving and Daily Life)*

Here are some symbols commonly used ih Mayan weaving. Using pictures of weaving by indigenous people or some actual samples that you may be able to borrow from people in your family or community who have traveled to Guatemala or Mexico, see if you can identify some of these traditional symbols.

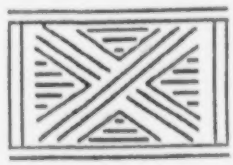
***Kumataz'in* or arc** *Kumatz* in Kaqchickel means snake. It may be associated with the feathered serpent, a pre-Hispanic concept. It may also represent hills or the high and low points in the life of a woman.



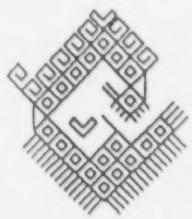
Two-headed eagle is motif of European origin that also represents a pre-Columbian concept of a god that has two faces, one looking ahead, the other looking back. One sees the good and the other the bad. Or, one faces earth and the other faces sky.



***Swej* or square** means earth or authority. Since the pre-Hispanic era, the Maya have conceived the universe as being square. It is linked to a rhombus, a pre-Columbian design which in ceremonial *huipiles* from Chiapas in Mexico represent the cosmos.



***Kumnek'pi'y'* or Dead Turkey** represents an offering from the groom's parents to the bride's parents given the day of their wedding in San Pedro Sacatepquez, Guatemala.



Lovers, bird and donkey represent the legend of the princess who fell in love with a young man from a lower social class. The king disapproved of the relationship and sent spies to spy on the couple. One of the spies was a bird who violated the king's orders and told the princess and her lover that her father wanted to separate them. He then transformed himself into their *nahual* (alter ego) and fled the kingdom with the lovers on a donkey.

Diamonds represent the universe and the daily path of the sun. The east is represented by the small diamond at the top; the west by the small diamond at the bottom. The large diamond in the center represents the sun resting in the center of its daily journey.

Consider whether or not we express anything to those around us by how we dress. For each of the following categories, tell how each might dress and why. Would any symbols be utilized? How?

a. Middle School student

b. Candidate for a Bar Mitzvah

c. Lawyer

d. Rock Star in a concert

e. College graduate going for a job interview.

f. Navy officer

An Excerpt from Profile of Education in Mexico
Produced and published by the Undersecretariat of Planning and Coordination, Ministry of Public Education, Mexico City, 1999

After students have read the following excerpt; divide them into small groups to respond to the following questions.

1. Who wrote and published the piece?

2. What problems have many indigenous people experienced?

3. What do you suppose is meant by a national curriculum? Do we have one in the United States? Who determines what is taught in our public schools? Who determines what is taught in independent schools?

4. What is bilingual education? Why is it important?

5. What lessons would be taught by using the package which includes a student book entitled This is Me, a photograph album and a full-length mirror?

6. Why would teacher training be a crucial part of the Ministry of Public Education's program?

7. Why should parents be involved in this effort to educate children?

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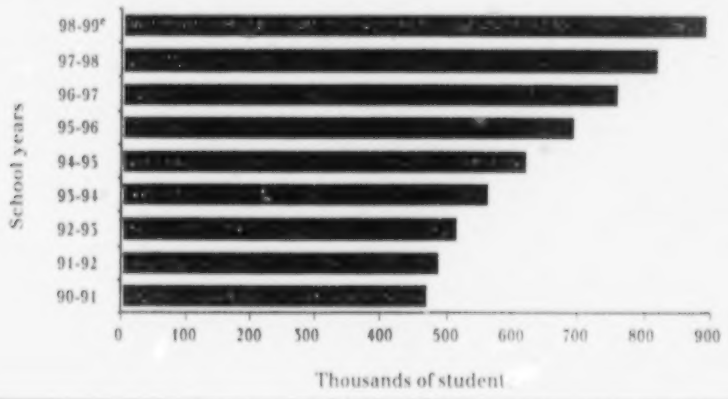
Telesecondary enrollment (1990-1998)



*estimated
Source: SEP

5.5 Indigenous education

Mexico is a multicultural nation in which men and women of different ethnic backgrounds live side-by-side and whose cultural diversity is based on the existence of numerous indigenous groups.

In this context, education becomes a valuable tool for strengthening national identity and unity. At the same time, it allows us to move forward in the construction of educational models suited to the specific conditions and characteristics of the different cultural and ethnic groups.

National Indigenous Institute (INI) estimates drawn from the figures of the XI National Population and Housing Census, 1990, and the 1995 INEGI Population Survey show that there are over ten million indigenous people living in Mexico today. They are mainly located throughout 24 states of the Republic and among them, they speak more than 80 tongues and variant dialects. The INI states that these groups of people are divided into 62 ethnicities, each of which represents a thousand-year-old culture, has its own tongue and traditions, and holds its own particular view of the world.

The presence of these communities constitute an expression of the great cultural wealth and diversity that exists in Mexico. However, largely due to the isolation and population dispersion of the majority of their settlements throughout national territory, these indigenous peoples suffer from severe underdevelopment which reduces their living standards and limits their possibilities for growth. According to the 1995 Population Survey, 83 percent of the country's 803 municipalities primarily inhabited by indigenous peoples were classified as having a high-to-very-high degree of marginalization.

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Ethnic Groups in Mexico (January, 1997)

Aquateco	Chontal-tab**	Huichol	Lacandón	Motozintleco	Popoluca	Tojolabal
Amuzgo	Chuj	Ixcateco	Mam	Nahua	Purépecha	Totonaca
Cakchiquel	Cochimí	Ixil	Matlatzinca	Ocuilteco	Quiché	Triqui
Chatino	Cora	Jacalteco	Maya	Otomí	Seri	Tzeltal
Chichimeca-Jonaz	Cucapá	Kanjobal	Mayo	Ppaipai	Tarahumara	Tzotzil
Chinanteco	Cuicateco	Kekchí	Mazahua	Pame	Teco	Yaqui
Chocho	Guarijío	Kikapú	Mazateco	Pápago	Tepehua	Zapoteco
Chol	Huasteco	Kiliwa	Mixe	Pima	Tepehuán	Zoque
Chontal-oax.*	Huave	Kumiai	Mixteco	Popoloca	Tlapaneco	

Source: National Indigenous Institute, (INI).
* state of Oaxaca
** state of Tabasco

Consequently, this gives full validity to the commitment to national education for the indigenous people and to the country's ethnic and cultural diversity in order to continue advancing towards the construction of a bilingual and intercultural teaching system. The latter, in addition to respecting cultural identities, must offer the student population education opportunities that give them an advantage for relating to their environment, and to the rest of society. Thus, the general aims and objectives of the national curriculum encompass the education provided to indigenous children and grant the necessary adaptations to cater to Mexico's cultural diversity.

Bilingual education is founded on attaining and stimulating the ability to read and write in one's own native language and is used as a teaching resource and a factor for reevaluating the cultural identity of these native populations. They are also taught competent reading and writing in Spanish since this is the official language of Mexico. In order to facilitate the learning processes for indigenous peoples and offer them quality service, the Ministry of Public Education devises and distributes different materials in both Spanish and indigenous tongues.

Special emphasis has been assigned to the publishing of free textbooks in indigenous languages. These books are edited up by bilingual teaching staff, with the help of the communities. In 1998, textbooks in indigenous tongues for first and second grades of elementary education were revised and reprinted, and 18 new titles were produced to attend to third and fourth grades. More than one million books were issued in 33 tongues and 52 variant dialects, thus meeting the demand for the 1998-1999 school year.

The education provided to indigenous children has an important component aimed at reinforcing the identity and self-esteem of the students. With this purpose in mind, a package which includes the student book entitled *This is me*, a school index, a photograph album, and a full-length mirror as an aid for classroom activities is being distributed among children.

Mexico's bilingual indigenous schools also supply books and audio cassettes containing songs, stories, and legends written in both indigenous tongues and Spanish that are created by children, teachers, and other members of the communities. So as to extend the benefits of this education, distance programs have been devised under which schools are provided with satellite dishes, television sets, and video-cassette-recorders, allowing them access to the materials produced and broadcasted via the Edusat Network.

In addition, an initial training model is being designed for those aspiring to become bilingual indigenous teachers. This model is aimed at ensuring the future professionalization of this staff, based on its careful selection and induction into the teaching profession. Thus, teachers in training acquire the basic skills for attending to the education of male and female students within contexts of cultural and linguistic diversity. For teachers already in service, a "workplace" training modality has been proposed, aimed at reflecting on and seeking alternative solutions to the concrete problems and needs faced by teachers in their everyday tasks.

Another work front for developing the model for initial and basic intercultural-bilingual education centers on the collective endeavors between teachers and schools for devising educational projects on an individual school and school-zone basis. This method allows the authorities to properly channel the efforts and interests of education-community members towards solving the most difficult problems they face in their workplaces or school zones.

Materials for the initial training of aspiring indigenous teachers
(Induction into the teaching profession)

- Guide for the observation and practicing of teaching
- Guide for practices
- My documents for training:
  The evaluation of learning
  Teaching
- Notes for teacher training I and II
- Work records for teacher training:
  a) The indigenous teacher and his or her training;
  b) Intercultural-bilingual education
  c) Learning
  d) Education work with indigenous boys and girls, and with parents I and II
  e) Evaluation of learning and interaction and participation in education
- Videos: Induction process to teaching 1997
  Program 1: An approximation of the aims of initial and basic intercultural-bilingual Education for girls and boys
  Program 2: Teaching activities
  Program 3: Teaching activities II
  Program 4: Moving towards the construction of a new school administration

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An Opinion Piece from The Siglo News, an English newspaper published in Guatemala City, Guatemala, July 11, 2000

The writer of this column, Estuardo Zapeta, is a Guatemalan from the Mayan group of indigenous people. He writes about his experience of coming to study in the United States. Look for the reference to Guatemalan Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu-also a Mayan. Read the column and answer and discuss the following questions in small groups.

1. Why does he refer to the United States as the "Norte"?

2. What does he do with the things his mother packed for him? Why do you think he does this?

3. What nickname does he use for Guatemala?

4. What impressed him about the United States?

5. Can you find a paragraph where he compares the United States to societies of "Iberian and Catholic origins"? What point does he make?

6. Can you speculate on what changes the writer would like to see in his own country?

Guest Columnist

The Gringos

As an Indian boy from the Guatemalan Highlands, my first arrival in the United States was scary. The "Norte" was both strange and amazing. My companion was a small suitcase in which my mother had stuffed several Momostecan "ponchos." The first airport trash can helped me unload my heavy and superfluous woolen handicrafts.

It was my first scholarship. And the first stop was Rice University in Houston. Yes, I was speechless at moving in a matter of hours between Guate and one of the so-called "Harvards of the South" (whatever that is).

Later, I moved to Iowa State University. It was huge, and my mother was right in loading me with Momostecan "ponchos" this time. It was so damn cold and damp. I even dreamt of penguins dancing around me (and I had not had any drinks).

I grew up immersed in the "anti-Yankee" mythology invented in the rural areas to scared the s— out of rebel children: "if you misbehave, the gringo will come to eat you up." The boogeyman was that non-existent "gringo" who used to take the children in a sack as part of a human banquet. I don't know who the hell concocted such a stupid story. Maybe it was Arbenz in 1954 (what a hypothesis!). Today the boogeymen are Japanese. Please, stop right there- no xenophobia (up North it is against "wetbacks.)

BY ESTUARDO ZAPETA
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The United States, I confess, impressed me from the first moment. It was kind of "rural boy meets big city." It still impresses me. Its diversity is so vibrant in any airport or city, its notion of size (everything is enormous), and its sense of order are so attractive. And U.S. universities are amazing (even with their "leftist" naiveté).

After Iowa State I came back to Guate. Oh boy, that reverse cultural shock was as hard on the senses as Rios Montt's scorched earth policy. And after some time I went back for graduate studies to the State University of New York at Albany, with another scholarship. Forget the Midwest, the East was a different territory (with an attitude, dude!). It was so different from Texas too, but the same Nation, after all.

How can the United States, with its rich cultural diversity, keep its unity within a relatively peaceful environment? After so many years I still have that question.

The East has an "academic charm" (Harvard, MIT, Yale, Dartmouth, Princeton, Columbia, Brown), and I am attracted to that charm (how come this Indian is talking about the "ivy league" monopoly?).

Education was (and is) the key "public policy" in the "Estados Unidos," and it is also the main cause for the country's growth. The system, at least according to my experience in college, is not perfect, but it allows competition, freedom of expression, exploration, analysis, experimentation, self criticism, and the creation of knowledge; and from there comes the US entrepreneurial spirit. That country celebrates diversity, while here we fear differences based on that socialist idea of "egalitarianism."

I also observe the United States' capacity to re-invent itself constantly. That Nation is a myth in constant construction, incomplete and with the capacity of retaining and seducing the world's best (Oh no, this Indian has become a postmodern creature!). I also observe in the US a great tolerance for self-criticism disguised as "sense of humor," and the open mind to correct, renew, and retry unparalleled in the world.

On the other hand, societies of "Iberian and Catholic" origins are more "indecisive, fearful and hypocritical", and wait for government regulations before doing anything. The "gringos" are more "engineers", and we are more "poets."

But the Unites States is far from a perfect Nation. Its crimes against Afro-Americans, and also against Native Americans cannot be forgotten. Its unwanted interventions all over the globe, with "Manifest Destiny" still in mind, is repugnant. The US, however, is there: take it or leave it. Learn from it, or abhor it. Yes, I do celebrate US diversity, and sure, I learn from its good side, and also from its major-league mistakes.

Another scholarship, and my destiny sends me to the Journalism School at the University of Missouri. Hey, I am back in the Midwest. But this time my concentration was on Guate, not on the US. I see the "mojados", and also the new generation of "brains", the ones like Francisco Goldman, who are creating that strange and interesting "gringo-maya-chapín-global" kind of thing. This is a challenge for anthropologists and ethnohistorians.

To use a metaphor, it is a symbiosis of "the 4th of July" with a "15 de septiembre" plus a "Maya New Year." (Yes, a few days ago I saw Rigoberta at Berkeley, strange, isn't it? Well, no. She is global.) Guate and the United States achieve unification through a common "human pool" of more than one million "? Maya-chapín-gringos" who regenerate a "new culture." It is something new, more in tune with "re-invention" and constant "re-presentation" of that "gringo" Nation, and as always, in Liberty. Something we have not enjoyed in Guatemala yet, and something we need so desperately.

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Women Strike in Mexico City

It has been said that indigenous women in Mexico and Guatemala have the lowest status in their respective social orders. Rigoberta Menchu, a Nobel Peace Prize-winning activist, was warned by her mother that "…an Indian woman is only respected if she's wearing her full costume. If she forgets her shawl, the community starts losing respect for her and a woman needs their respect."(Burgos-Debray p. 210)

Read the article entitled "Fighting for some Respect in the Land of Machismo" and discuss the answers to the following questions.

1. Who went on strike and what were they protesting?

2. Though women's roles are not as limited as they once were, what continues to be a problem for many women?

3. What was the goal of this strike?

4. What was meant by the slogan "Democracy begins at home!"?

5. Give some examples of concrete ways in which Mexican women are better off than their mothers were.

6. Do you think indigenous women would have participated in this strike? Why or why not?

7. In our own society, what double standards still exist between men and women?

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Capitalinos over the weekend participate in a pretest for increased women's rights.

STRIKE AGAINST HOUSEWORK

Fighting For Some Respect In The Land Of Machismo

By MARY BETH SHERIDAN
Los Angeles Times

For the first time in 23 years, Irene Ortega slept late this weekend.

She didn't get up at 6 a.m. to fix her husband's meals for the day. She didn't haul out the washboard to scrub the clothes. Her husband was duly informed he could fend for himself: She was on strike.

"He looked at me bug-eyed," the 60-year-old street vendor reported cheerfully. "He said, 'Why, you old copycat.' "

Ortega was joining an insurrection by hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of Mexican homemakers who dropped their mops, hung up their aprons and boycotted their ironing boards on Saturday. They were participating in one of the most unusual work stoppages Mexico has ever seen: a one-day national strike against housework, intended to highlight women's contributions in a society famous for machismo.

"This is aimed at converting the invisible into the visible," said Gabriela Delgado, head of the capital's Women's Institute, referring to housework. Her institute is part of the center-left Mexico City government, which helped promote the event.

The strike appeared to be more symbolic than massive. But the widely publicized work stoppage captured the attention of a society in which women's roles are rapidly changing.

Although about half of Mexican women are principally homemakers, women have poured into the work force and universities in recent years. What hasn't changed is their place in

☛ See **MACHISMO** Page 5

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MACHISMO

Continued From Page 4

the home. Even those with outside jobs, such as Ortega, find they must do the household chores that traditionally have fallen to women.

That is: just about all of them.

"Before I leave home, I have to work. When I get home, I have to work," said Ortega, a woman in a bright pink sweatshirt and Virgin of Guadalupe medal who puts in a 10-hour day selling music cassettes in Mexico City's Alameda Park.

Her husband, she says, is "macho" and only reluctantly pitches in.

On Saturday, however, he was on his own. Ortega slept in until 8 a.m., bathed, then headed out to a street stand to indulge in some consomme and "barbacoa," rich lamb tacos. It was, says the mother of two, her first day off from housework since 1977, when she spent a day in bed. Normally, she works seven days a week, in addition to keeping up the house. "I'm a Mexican woman," she explained.

The strike had lofty aims. Its organizers, various women's organizations and the city government, hope to have domestic work included in national figures on economic growth. They want men to pitch in more at home. And they would like the media and textbooks to portray housework as a mutual responsibility.

Organizers sponsored a protest march to the traditional heart of Mexico's political power, the capital's giant Zocalo plaza, on the eve of the strike. About 500 women participated, banging pots and chanting: "Democracy begins at home!"

Once in the Zocalo, the protesters listened to speakers denounce the unfairness: official statistics show only half of working men pitch in at home — compared with 94 percent of Mexican women with outside jobs.

Such data didn't surprise Laura Quiroz, 48, a television production worker who joined the march. She had announced to her spouse she that planned to take part in Saturday's strike. He was not amused.

"He said, 'I don't care. In this house, we need to eat,' " she said with a grimace. Women were making progress, she sighed. "But it's little by little."

Rosario Rosas, 47, a housewife in Mexico City's working-class Tepito neighborhood, had limited hopes for Saturday's strike. The mother of three wasn't interested in making housework part of GDP. She hoped for something much more modest: a tiny income of her own. All the money she received from her husband was earmarked for the household, she explained.

"Men can go to the cantina with their friends. Women can't," she said, because they lack money and are criticized for such independence.

Birthrates have plummeted in recent decades, due to extensive government family-planning programs. Young women often have twice as many years of education as their mothers. The percentage of women in the work force has more than doubled since 1970, to nearly 40 percent.

And women, who didn't get the vote until 1953, have become more politically active. In this year's presidential race, candidates made an unprecedented effort to hold rallies with women and offer them special programs. In Mexico City, women's issues have been a priority, with the local government setting up special centers to address problems such as female unemployment and domestic abuse.

Delgado, of the Mexico City Women's Institute, said it was impossible to calculate how many women observed Saturday's strike. But the impact of the event appeared to ripple far beyond those who actually put down their brooms.

There were discussions such as the one between Angelica Cruz, 45, and her husband, a 48-year-old copy editor, who were eating with their daughter at an outdoor taco stand in Mexico City.

Asked her opinion of the strike, Cruz told a reporter: "Good."

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